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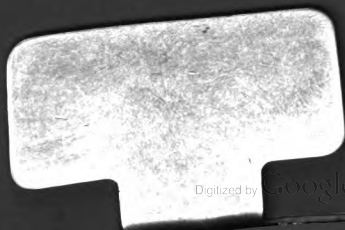
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THE ARMY OF CHRIST  
LENTEN SERMONS.

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REV. M. A. KEENE, A.B.







# THE ARMY OF CHRIST:

A SERIES OF

## LENTEN SERMONS.

BY THE

REV. MARTIN A. KEENE, A.B.

Curate of Harold's Cross, in the Diocese of Dublin; Author of  
"Pleasure and Pain: with other Papers."



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“O ALMIGHTY God, who by Thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to Thy Apostle Saint Peter many excellent gifts, and commandedst him earnestly to feed Thy flock ; make, we beseech Thee, all Bishops and Pastors diligently to preach Thy holy word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

# SERMON I.

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## THE ARMY OF CHRIST : ITS DISCIPLINE AND UNIFORM.

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“ All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility : for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”—  
1 St. PETER, v. 5.

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THE words humble and humility, both in English and in the language of the New Testament, are derived from words, signifying the ground, and refer to the outward gesture, by which that state of mind is usually manifested.

In Eastern countries respect for superiors is shown either by a bow, so profound, that the head nearly touches the ground ; or by a complete prostration of the whole body on the earth. And even with ourselves, as the haughty erecting of the head is the way of expressing pride, so is bowing, or in some cases, kneeling, the usual mark of respect and deference. If, then, humility be, as it is, a desirable thing, we

may well wish to be able to take up in this sense words, which we should never desire to be true in the sense in which the Psalmist uttered them—"My soul cleaveth unto the dust." This we should specially desire at this present season of humiliation, when we are called to think upon our sins, and humble ourselves because of them. Thus, to lie low both toward God and toward man is at once a safe and a happy position—nay more, the only safe and happy position. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." It is at the root of half our misery and sin. It cleaves more firmly to us, perhaps, than any other evil, appearing now in one form, now in another, often seeming like an angel of light, but ever bringing along with it unhappiness to its victim, and to those around. In those led by the Spirit of God, its effects are much to be deplored. It mars the work of Divine grace in the heart, eats away many a fair fruit of holiness, and thus brings injury to the Christian and dishonour to his Lord. How earnestly then should we desire and pray to be humble!—humble toward man and toward God. Nothing more frequently and seriously than want of humility hinders the sinner's entrance through the strait gate, and after he has entered checks his pro-

gress in the narrow way that leads to life. May you and I, dear brethren, daily be made more truly humble, and thus more truly happy and holy. May we learn of Him, who was meek and lowly of heart, that so we may find rest to our souls. That which we have brought before us this evening is humility toward man: "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility."

I. In the first place, let us consider the direction, "All of you be subject one to another." What are we to understand by words like these? Do they require us to disregard the distinctions of rank and position, appointed by Him who ruleth over all? Is the whole fabric of society to be upset, so that the master may take the place of the servant, the parent of the child, the monarch of the subject? By no means. The very opposite is the lesson taught here, as every where else in Holy Scripture. In the words immediately before the text the Apostle says, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." Some have thought that we have here a repetition of the important rule so often repeated in Scripture, that young persons should yield proper respect and obedience to those farther on in life. There is not enough in our days of such deference and respect for

the aged, such as prevailed so widely and so rightly in days gone by. True, old age may not always bring with it wisdom and piety, and other qualities fitted to draw forth esteem and reverence; yet, even then, a deference at least is due to it; but when these things are found, what more noble than an aged saint grown old in the service of Christ, mellowed by the discipline of life, and ripe for the heavenly garner? Truly, "a hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness."

It is very evident, however, from the first verses of this chapter, that the word "elder," at least, has not this wide general sense. There the title presbyter, which is shortened into priest in our Prayer Book, evidently belongs to the Christian minister. St. Peter claims a share in that ministry, and exhorts his fellow elders or presbyters, to feed the flock of God with disinterestedness and humility, looking forward to a future reward. If elders are thus the ministers of the Church, the younger must be either its lay members, as some have thought; or else, what seems to me more likely, the junior ministers, whom we call deacons, and who are exhorted to be subject to the presbyters or elders. In other parts of Scripture we meet with similar exhortations to proper sub-

ordination. We find subjects exhorted to be in subjection even to *heathen* kings and governors; wives to be subject to their husbands; children, to their parents; servants, to their masters; so that plainly the direction to all Christians, to be subject one to another, is by no means meant to do away with these distinctions. Indeed, the very word here used, "be subject," would in itself tell us this. It is that used of the discipline of an army. We know of what immense importance such discipline is. The severest penalties are inflicted for breach of it—sometimes even the penalty of death. This is not a wanton sacrifice of life; for in time of war far more lives would be lost were a spirit of insubordination to be tolerated, than are thus sacrificed for the maintenance of discipline. Just such is the view which holy Scripture gives of our state here.

The Church of Christ is spoken of as an army—the Church militant here on earth—every individual in that army being a soldier of the Cross, fighting under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil. The professing visible Church contains within it not only many real, loyal soldiers, who fight their Lord's battles in their Lord's strength, but also, alas! many, very many, who have never fought one hour

against the foe ; but, while wearing Christ's uniform, called by His name, and pledged by most solemn vows to serve Him, bear rebel hearts beneath the Christian uniform, never having become truly at peace with God through Jesus Christ. Now, what is the secret of strength to the true soldiers of the Cross? How shall that comparatively small and feeble band be mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan, and the establishing the kingdom of Christ? The direction of the text supplies the answer—"All of you be subject one to another." In other words, let not the officer surrender his place to the private, nor the private to the officer ; but let each one, while keeping his own place and doing his own duty, be ready in the great conflict to render service to his neighbour, without unduly standing on any false notions of his own dignity and importance, but with an eye only to the final victory of the whole army, and to the honour of the Great Captain of our salvation. Yes, brethren, this is the real secret of happiness, contentment, and victory, both in the Church and in the world. Both as men and as Christians we have too little of this spirit. We are too much wrapped up in the thought of ourselves as individuals, and too

little concerned for the good of the whole. How often has a small band of faithful soldiers—bound together by a common danger, by hope of a common victory, and by ardent attachment to a common leader—how often has such a band been led on by that leader triumphantly against vastly superior forces! Their much-loved general had assigned each man the place he was best fitted for, and each desired first to do his own work, and secondly, to give his comrade a helping-hand in time of need—in the hour of some special assault. The chief desire of each would be, not to gain honour for himself, but, even with the loss of this, to secure the glory and triumph of his commander.

Such ought to be our views of our position in the Church and in the world. We should remember that it is God who has set us each in the position we severally occupy. We should not envy those who have a higher place, or despise those who have a lower. We should ever respect both ourselves and everybody else. We should not value ourselves on the position and advantages bestowed on us, but only on the use we make of these. And if we be really set on pleasing Him, who seeth not as man seeth, we will ever be conscious of too many defects and



shortcomings in ourselves to give us any ground for pride or self-satisfaction. Yea, seeing how others with, perhaps, far fewer opportunities, with less of time, and money, and education, and influence, are doing—and have done—great things for God, we will find in the remembrance of this abundant help to thinking humbly of ourselves and highly of others. We will be enabled “in honour to prefer one another”—“in lowliness of mind each to esteem others better than himself.” Yea more, when, like our Lord’s disciples, we are tempted to have a strife among us who shall be the greatest, we will remember that in Christ’s army the least and lowliest in his own eyes is greatest; that He said, “He that is least among you all the same shall be great;” that He declared that things were not to be among His servants as among the princes and people of this world; “but,” said He, “whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Our text goes on to say—“Be clothed with humility.” We have already spoken of the discipline of Christ’s soldiers, and here we have their uniform.

This uniform was worn by the Great Captain Himself during His sojourn on earth. It is by no means a gorgeous or dazzling one, but in its simplicity and unobtrusiveness is its true beauty. The Apostle Peter, in our text, evidently alludes (from the words he employs) to that scene in the Gospel history in which he bore so conspicuous a part. We read in St. John xiii. that during that solemn last supper of which our Lord partook with His disciples, He, in the full consciousness of all His dignity, "knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that he was come from God and went to God," He rose from supper and girded Himself with a towel, as slaves are wont to do. Then, having poured water into a basin, He proceeded to wash His disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. Peter alone is said to have stood out for a time against this humiliation of his Lord, so that we need not wonder to find him alluding to it. Our Saviour showed that He meant His disciples to learn from what He had done. He said—"Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given

you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

Thus, this second direction of the text corresponds very closely to the first. If our blessed Lord, the Master of all, was content thus to clothe Himself with humility, to wear the humble garb of a slave, to perform a service for those whose highest honour was to be allowed to serve Him, how much more ready should we be to overstep some of the minor distinctions in the household of faith, if thus only we can help, for time or eternity, some of our fellow-servants. If we would thus be indeed good soldiers and servants of Jesus Christ, we will need continually to turn this command into a prayer—to ask Him who gave us an example that we should follow His steps, that He would Himself furnish us with this garment of humility, and thus enable us in this, as in every other respect, to follow the direction of the Apostle, and "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

There are many ways in which we may be tempted to lay aside this precious attire. We need to guard against pride of rank—of our family and position in society. Distinctions of this kind should, of course, be properly observed, as the appointment of God; but for a man to be puffed up with a vain conceit of

these, is surely absurd, when we remember that we ourselves have no part in deciding our position in this respect, and that if there be some below us, there are also very many far above us. All other things, too, which are mere accidents of birth, (as they are called,) such as personal stature or appearance, are certainly no ground for thinking highly of ourselves. These, also, as plainly as the things last mentioned, are very evidently wholly the gift of God. He who gave, can very soon mar or take away the gift, and unless they be accompanied with other gifts more solid and enduring, they may, as they often do, prove a curse and not a blessing. So with pride of wealth; if this has been attained by honorable means, and if it be employed according to the will of God, it may, indeed be a blessing; but certainly in itself it is not a thing to be proud of. Very often, indeed, we find material wealth accompanied by greatest moral and spiritual poverty, and then how little are its possessors valued even by worldly men! Moreover, riches soon take to themselves wings, and flee away, or men are called to go where they cannot take anything of this kind along with them.

Wisdom and learning may appear to many better worth being proud of. Certainly they belong to the

higher part of man ; but the most we can hope to attain on earth, is just enough to show us how little of either we possess. Moreover, if our wisdom and learning be only that of earth—if we be strangers to the wisdom which is from above, to the knowledge of God—our wisdom is foolishness with God—we know nothing yet as we ought to know.

This leads us up to one other class of things of which we may be tempted to be proud—I mean those things which are of the highest value—the knowledge of salvation through Christ and the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the heart. Spiritual pride is, perhaps, the most dangerous, because the most insidious kind. It is one of Satan's favourite temptations, only too successful, even with those who are proof against many others. Most earnestly should we desire to be delivered from all these kinds of pride. One word of Scripture ought to cut at the root of all—"Who maketh thee to differ from another? or what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" In truth, brethren, we are all beggars—pensioners on the bounty of our common God and Father, and so with no reason to be puffed up one above another. The text tells us how we may use anything that has been entrusted to us for God's

glory and our own and our fellow-creatures' good, by ever keeping it under the garment of humility. If men parade before their fellows, and make a boast of their rank, personal appearance, wealth, or learning, they rob God of His glory, they injure themselves, and they make it impossible that these should be fully turned to account for the good of others. But if they cover all over with the garb of humility, they may then use all these various gifts of God for His glory, for their own happiness, and their fellow-creatures' present and eternal good.

Still more is this the case with regard to the gifts and graces of the Spirit. All these are very delicate and tender; and if they be exposed to observation, they must ever be impaired. If we would keep them safe, and cherish them amid the chilling blasts of this world, we must ever keep them clothed with humility. Nor can we with safety make much even of the clothing. There is as much danger of pride in this spiritual dress as in ordinary clothing. How, then, are we to wear this garment of humility? I answer, just in the way in which we ought to wear our literal clothing. The rule with regard to this appears to be, that we should so appear as that no one may have any special cause to notice our attire—

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that we should dress according to our means and station in life, whatever these may be. A really excellent and well-trained, much more a spiritual mind, will disdain excessive care and undue expense on that which to it will appear of very small importance compared with that which is within. The Christian rule on this matter is given by the Apostle Peter—"Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, or of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man," &c. (1 Pet. iii. 3, 4.) Thus, while a Christian will need the clothing of humility to keep every other gift and grace in health, he will no less need to guard against becoming proud even of that clothing, for to this, also, will he be tempted.

Brethren, if pride be thus a hindrance to progress in the Christian life, it is no less truly a hindrance to entering upon it. The pride I am all along speaking of, is that towards our fellow-men. This will ever separate us from them, but it will also separate us from God. He who continues to pride himself wholly on his earthly advantages, must still be refusing to acknowledge God as the Giver of them all; he must still be without that light which would enable him to see that the greatest and the best of men without

Christ, are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. This appears still more clearly in regard to spiritual things. There may not be many among us who would, through ignorance of the plan of salvation, or even could with regard to truth, take up the words of the Pharisee in the parable and say, as their plea for acceptance with God—"I fast twice in the week ; I pay tithes of all that I possess ;" or in a like strain, I attend public worship every Sunday ; I partake regularly of the Supper of the Lord ; I do my duty towards my family ; and am upright and straightforward in my dealings, and what can I lack yet ? We know too well that this might be done without the faith and love of Christ, or any desire to please Him. But while few, if any, might be tempted to appear on such a ground *before God*, many might be led to take up the other words of the Pharisee and say—God, I thank thee I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as such and such a person.

Now, this is not the right ground for any of us to stand on before God. A king would be little likely to bestow his pardon on a rebel, who came seeking that pardon by trying to magnify the crime of his fellow-rebels, and making light of his own ; at all



events, our King does not so, for our text says—“God resisteth the proud.” He does so in every thing, but more particularly in the matter of salvation. God would not have us separate ourselves from our fellows, and seek to stand on a different footing from them. “All have sinned;” “All the world is guilty before God,” and He will have us come to Him, as partakers to the full in all this sin, that we may share also in His forgiving mercy. May none of us be found among those who, from fancied ideas of their own worth, or from dwelling on their superiority to others, are counted by God among the proud whom He resists! Who can hope to prevail against Him? But our text adds, “He giveth grace to the humble.” This He did in the case of the Publican. Unlike the Pharisee, he said nothing of his fellow-worshipper. That he had nothing to do with. He might have talked of the Pharisee’s formalism and self-righteousness, as the Pharisee did of his extortion and injustice; but no, he leaves his neighbour to himself and to God, and he seeks pardon for his own sin with deepest earnestness. Here is no long formal catalogue of his own virtues, but one earnest piercing cry uttered from the depth of his heart, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Bre-

thren, here is a model prayer for you and me. It puts us in our place as lost sinners, and asks for the only thing we have a right to expect from God, unmerited mercy. Might not some one here who has not yet done so, try this plan. Seek no more to cloke or palliate your sins before Almighty God our Heavenly Father. Tell out to Him every one of them without reserve in all their hatefulness. Ask Him for Jesus' sake to grant you true repentance; to forgive you all your sins, negligences, and ignorances; and to endue you with the grace of His Holy Spirit, to amend your life according to His holy word. He will do this, for He "giveth grace to the humble." Our Saviour Jesus Christ is exalted "to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins." These things are His free gift, which He is waiting to bestow on all who will have them. Will you have them on His terms? If so, come to Him for them without any more delay. You shall not be sent empty away, for our text says, "He giveth grace to the humble;" and it is written of the publican, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

## SERMON II.

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### THE ARMY OF CHRIST: ITS SUBJECTION TO THE GREAT COMMANDER.

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“God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”—1 St. PETER, v. 5, 6.

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THE opening words of the text are a quotation from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. They are found in Prov. iii. 34, and are rendered in our version—“Surely He scorneth the scorners; but He giveth grace unto the lowly.” They are used here by the Apostle Peter to enforce two distinct but closely connected exhortations; one, that which we had before us last Sunday evening, an exhortation to humility toward man; the other, that brought before us this evening, an exhortation to humility toward God. On last Sunday, we saw how God resists those who are proud toward their fellows, while giving grace to those who have humble views

of themselves as compared with others. Now, let us inquire how He resists those who are proud toward Himself, while giving grace to those who are humble toward Him.

I. Did not Scripture and experience too plainly oppose the idea, we might suppose it quite impossible that any man should entertain proud or arrogant thoughts of himself in reference to God. We can understand a man measuring himself with his fellow-men, and led, in the comparison, to form a high estimate of his own worth—"to think of himself more highly than he ought to think;" but that a man, the creature of a day, one tiny, insignificant being out of 1,000,000,000 like inhabitants of a planet which is only a small member of a system of planets, the central sun of which is more than 350,000 times greater than our earth; while that system itself is but one of countless myriads of like systems, existing in the boundless regions of space—that a man, I say, such a mere speck in God's creation! should presume to lift up himself against the Infinite Creator of all—this might well seem a thing impossible. And yet, brethren, how frequently this is done, and has been done, by most of us—how frequently, not merely by those who are afar off and

ignorant of God, but even by those who have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ—who enjoy somewhat of “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” So, alas, it has ever been since our first parents learned from Satan to doubt their Maker’s wisdom and love. Since then, there have ever been those to whom the words of Jehovah, in Isaiah, xlv. 9, would apply—“Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! a potsherd among the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?” Thus did Jehovah answer the people of Israel when they questioned His dealings with them, in sending them into captivity for their sins and declaring that the kingdom of God, taken from them, should be given to the Gentiles—a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof; and so, when we would foolishly presume to act like them, He calls us to remember what we are as compared with Him—even as broken scraps of earthenware in the workshop of a potter. It would be as reasonable for one of those worthless sherds, were it able to do so, to rise up from among the rest and find fault with the work done by the potter, as for us, the work of God’s hand, to presume to criti-

cize and find fault with the Creator's handywork—with His dealings in creation and providence—so small a portion of which we have any knowledge of. If we would be delivered from such vain, foolish pride toward God, we only need to know *Him* better, and *ourselves* better. All pride springs from ignorance. It is no pride to have a correct view of ourselves; to acknowledge the blessings and advantages we possess; as, on the other hand, it is no proof of humility, but often only of a subtle pride, to cry ourselves down, and make little of the talents, of whatever kind, with which God has entrusted us. Pride is, in fact, the idolatry of self—an inordinate self-esteem. Humility is simply the dethroning of this idol, and "consists," as has been well said, "not so much in thinking meanly of ourselves as in not thinking of ourselves at all." Thus, to "be filled with the Spirit"—to have God our all in all—to have Christ "dwelling in our hearts by faith," is the true way to be humble; for if our minds be taken up with the indwelling presence of God, and the thought of pleasing Him—there will be little time for thinking about and seeking to please ourselves.

We know from the whole of Scripture how hateful to God is the sin of idolatry. Now, seeing that pride

is the idolatry of a most unworthy object—self, we need not wonder at the statement of the text, “God resisteth the proud.” This is, in truth, the worst of sins, as it lies at the root of all sins. It has been well said—“Other sins lower man, pride alone exalts him against God; other sins fly from God, pride alone opposes itself to God. Therefore, God also in turn, opposes Himself to the proud.” It is for the good of His intelligent creatures that God thus resists the proud. We can see the need of His doing so from the very constitution of things in this world framed by Him. He points us to the monarch and his subjects, to the general and his soldiers, to the master and his servants, to the teacher and his scholars, to the father and his children, and in all these earthly relationships appointed by Himself, He tells us to learn of heavenly things, even of the relation of God to His intelligent creatures. Take but one of these varied illustrations, that most frequently employed in Scripture, and see how it shows the necessity that God should resist the proud. We could understand the head of a family distressed by such a spirit prevailing in his household. It would be bad and mischievous enough, even when only shown by the children toward one another. Then it

would lead to quarrelling, disunion, and discomfort, and the parent would do everything in his power to check and punish the offenders. But when that same spirit was manifested toward himself, how much more foolish and dangerous would it be. If an inexperienced and self-willed child sought to usurp the position of the wise and experienced father, this would call for still more decided opposition. Pride thus manifested would lead not merely to present unhappiness, but, if unchecked, would tend to encourage through the whole circle a spirit of insubordination, which would for ever destroy the comfort of the house, would make it a bad example to others round, and would probably remain with all the inmates throughout their after-life.

Brethren, who can hope to prosper if he has God not only not helping, but resisting him? The issue of such a struggle is certain. The powers of the opponents are not equally matched. If—though children of God by faith in Christ Jesus—we allow proud thoughts against God, we are surely grieving and dishonouring our best Friend; and if we be still rejecting the atonement of our Saviour, and living in estrangement from God and enmity against Him, oh, remember the end of those who, in the



stubbornness of their hearts, despise the goodness, patience, and long-suffering of God calling them continually to repentance. "He resisteth the proud." He scorneth the scorers; yea, a day is coming, of which we read—"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision!" But there is a happier side to this declaration. He giveth grace to the humble. Well has it been said that, "Humility is the vessel of the Graces." Archbishop Leighton says—"God's sweet dews and showers of grace slide off the mountains of pride, and fall on the low valleys of humble hearts, and make them pleasant and fertile." The swelling heart, puffed up with a fancy of fulness, has no room for grace. It is lifted up, and is not hollowed and fitted to receive and contain the graces that descend from above.

Brethren, God's grace is the most precious thing we can have here, as His glory is that we hope to share hereafter. Grace is glory begun, as glory is grace completed. The more we enjoy of God's grace here, the more we shall enjoy of His glory by-and-by; but if we have no grace, we can have no glory. How earnestly, then, should we desire to be among those to whom God's grace is given. Our text says, He gives it to the humble. Grace can only be thus

received as a gift. There is nothing in any man whatever to *merit* God's favour—where enjoyed by any sinner, it is always *free* favour. Nay, were it not thus free, it would no longer be grace at all in the sense in which that word is usually employed in Scripture. But some one may say, If God's grace be thus free, how comes it that our text limits it to the humble? The answer is not difficult. You remember that most beautiful prayer of our Liturgy, in which we ask God to send down upon His Church the healthful Spirit of His Grace—the continual dew of His blessing. Here God's grace is likened to the rain and dew which so wondrously fertilize the ground. We know the dew and rain descend on evil and good ground alike—on the hard rock, the trampled pathway, and the carefully ploughed and harrowed field. How valuable they are to the latter, how useless to the former. Even so it is with the sinner's heart. If we receive the grace of God into a proud heart, we must receive it in vain; we must be, save in increased responsibility, even as though we had not received it. The dew and rain have no effect on the hard rock, save only slightly to wear away and polish the surface, so that there is less and less to catch the drops of water, or those fragments of earth,

falling from above, on which some small plant might grow. So with the hard, unrenewed heart, called in Scripture the heart of stone. The dew and rain of heavenly grace, of the gospel of salvation read, and preached, and taught—this falls continually on it in this favoured land of ours. What is too often the effect? Alas, brethren, in too many cases, it is just that of the rain upon the rock. At first there was, if I may so say, some roughness on the surface—the showers did not all glide off; but gradually, the more frequent and heavy the showers, all this slight hold is lost; the rock is as hard as ever, but more completely and rapidly than ever do the dew and rain pass away from it and descend to irrigate the valley beneath. Brethren, what poor sinners want is a new heart—an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart. Such a heart never receives the dew and rain of Divine grace in vain. That is the soil prepared to receive it—prepared by God the Holy Spirit, for it is written, “the preparations of the heart in man are of the Lord.” May He be pleased thus to prepare your heart and mine, dear brethren.

If our hearts have been already opened, as Lydia's was, to receive the grace of God—then we want

more grace—we want it every day to descend like a continual dew, if we are not to be like parched and fruitless soil. May our Lord, as He did of old, vouchsafe continually to send His gracious rain upon His inheritance, to refresh it when it is weary; and that this may be effectual, may He condescend to deepen the soil of humility—to give us more and more

“An humble, lowly, contrite heart,  
Believing, true and clean,  
Which neither life nor death can part,  
From Him that dwells within.”

But if we have never yet been humbled before God, because of our sins, if sin has never been a trouble to us, weighing us down, and leading us to fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us in Jesus Christ—what then remains for us but earnestly to plead with God for a fulfilment of that most blessed promise found in Ezek. xxxvi. 26—“A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh.”? If He put such a spirit within us, then shall we be in a fit state to receive that grace, which God gives only to the humble and con-

trite, and doing so we shall know what is meant by "being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

II. And now, as we have seen something of the meaning of the statement, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble," let me urge upon you, and upon myself, the exhortation, based on these words—"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God." It is at all times right, and our bounden duty, to be humble before God; but there are certain times when we are in a special degree called to be so. Such a time is that referred to here, when God's mighty hand is specially stretched out to chasten His children. Such chastisement, in some way, and at some time, all God's children need; and He never sends it except when it is needed. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" This chastening comes in various ways. To those whom the Apostle here addresses it came in the shape of persecution for the name of Jesus. This appears in every chapter of the Epistle, each con-

taining words of exhortation and encouragement, suited to such circumstances.

From this kind of affliction we, thank God, are almost entirely free, but every servant of Christ will need some trials. Whenever they come to us, their object is to lead us to humble ourselves before our God; this is no easy thing to do. The very best and most dutiful child will at times do something to call for reproof and correction from its parents, and under that discipline how apt he will be to rebel—still more—to think very hardly and undutifully of his parents. While he so thinks he will not profit by the chastisement, but when he submits and humbly acquiesces in his parents' treatment, as needful, and wise, and kind—then will he be brought nearer than ever to the hand that smote him, and the return of filial confidence and love will bring with it the return of happiness and peace. So often is it in the Christian's life on earth. It is not always at once, but often long "afterwards," that God's chastenings "yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." Sometimes He has to deal with us as He did with Israel of old, of whom He says in Hos. v. 15, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and

seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early."

Whenever our time of trial comes may we be enabled to glorify our Lord in the fires—saying with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," and thus shall we secure for our own the promise of "the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." How loud a message does affliction bring to those who have not yet been brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ! This much is certain, brethren, we must all have our troubles, great or small, while passing through this present evil world; we are "born to them as the sparks fly upward." The only question is, what effect are they to have upon us? They certainly will have some effect upon us. Pleasures may often leave little impression, either for good or evil, but sorrows plough us deep, and so do most to form our characters for good or evil. If we do not turn to Him that smites us, we will be sure to turn more than ever away from Him. Thus it is, that while we see some refined and purified in the furnace of affliction—reflecting clearly the Re-

finer's image to the glory of His name—others who have passed through quite similar sorrows, are worse and not better for them all—hardened in enmity against God, utterly embittered against Him. Of the latter we have an instance in Pharaoh, whose end was destruction; while of the happier effect of trouble we have an example in King Manasseh, of whom we read in 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13—"When he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him; and He was intreated of him, and heard his supplications and restored him to his throne. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God."

Let us not wait to turn humbly to Him till our Heavenly Father is constrained to send troubles and sorrows to lead us to do so. It is well, indeed, to be brought to Him in any way, but to be *so* brought is both trying and painful to man and less honouring to God. Remember, if God do not say concerning you those awful words—"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone," He will send trials to lead you to seek after Him that smites you. Oh seek, without all this, to humble yourself truly before God as a lost sinner! Ask Him by His Holy Spirit



to humble you in the very dust before Him, to convince you of your sins, to show you yourself as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." He can do this, brethren, and only He. Wait on Him for this unceasingly, as many another here has done. Ask Him again and again, for Jesus' sake, to give you His Spirit to convince you of your sins—to show you yourself as in His sight. Pray that He may, in His own way, lead you to the foot of the cross as a weary, heavy-laden sinner. Lie low before your crucified Redeemer, and determine, that if you perish, you will do so, looking to Him and waiting on Him. You cannot perish so, for He has said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth." Yes, in answer to your prayers, He may bring you low, but it is only that He may lift you up.

III. Our text tells us the happy result of such humiliation before God; it is, "that He may exalt you in due time." It may be this lifting up may not come at once. For years, often, we heed not God's calls to us to turn to Him; but, when we do so turn, we are too prone proudly to expect that we shall not be kept a single moment. This cannot be. Delay makes us feel more deeply than we would otherwise,

how wretched and helpless we must for ever be without Christ. Long we lived contentedly in the horrible pit and miry clay ; now that we acknowledge our vileness, and truly repent us of our faults, we long to be at once delivered. If we truly desire to be Christ's and to walk in newness of life, let us not be ready to despair. He may leave us thus for a time, that we may more earnestly long for His salvation ; but He will not leave us thus for ever ; He will exalt us in due time. Let us by faith lay hold of Christ our Saviour ; let us lean our whole weight on His Almighty arm ; and soon we shall be able to say with David, (Psa. xl. 1-3,) " I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings ; and He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God." The path on which a Christian thus enters is an upward path. The Christian's cry should ever be—"Nearer, my God, to Thee." "Oh ! for a closer walk with God !" If we walk humbly with our God, then we shall walk closely with Him ; for He hath respect unto the lowly, but the proud He knoweth afar off." What higher exaltation can we desire here than this,

to walk with God, to be called "the friend of God." In due time, what He sees, not what we see to be such, He will say, "Friend, come up higher." We shall depart to be with Christ our Lord, which is far better than anything here ; or else, better still, He shall come again to receive all His people to Himself, that where He is, there we may be also. Then shall those who now humble themselves before Him, be indeed exalted. Then will our Lord indeed "raise up the poor out of the dust, and the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory." Yea, ye will make His people, now often little and despised, "kings and priests unto God, and they shall reign for ever and ever."

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## SERMON III.

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### THE ARMY OF CHRIST: ITS DEPENDENCE ON THE GREAT COMMANDER.

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"Casting all your care upon him ; for he careth for you."  
1 St. PETER, v. 7.

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It may truly be said of all God's commandments contained in Holy Scripture, "in keeping of them there is great reward." The reward is present as well as future. We know there is a reward altogether future awaiting all the followers of Christ, when time shall have passed away. One of the last declarations made in Scripture by our Saviour refers to this. He says, in Rev. xxii. 12, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." In the prospect of that reward, we read that Moses "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect

unto the recompense of the reward." By that same blessed hope we find the apostles and early disciples of Christ animated continually under severest persecutions—obeying thus the command of their Divine Master—"Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." But while true Christians have thus much to make them happy in "the hope that is laid up for them in heaven," all their peculiar happiness is not in hope; they have much also in present enjoyment. The Psalmist says, not *after* keeping, but "*in* keeping of God's commandments there is great reward." All who in any age have made trial of the narrow path of obedience—of the King's highway of holiness—have, without one single exception, found it to be "a way of pleasantness, and a path of peace." We have already seen something of the truth of this in regard to the two-fold exhortation to one Christian duty which has formed the subject of our consideration the last two Sunday evenings. We have, I trust, seen that humility towards God and man is not only our duty and our wisdom, but also our highest happiness here and hereafter.

One way in which humility towards God tends to make His children happy, is set before us in the short verse which I have selected as our text this evening.

It helps to free them from care. To be free from care is, indeed, an unspeakable blessing; and we can easily see how the heart of him who walks humbly with his God will, in proportion to the closeness of that walk, be free from care; while he who strays afar off from God cannot fail, as life advances, to be overborne with the many pressing anxieties of this work-a-day world. Brethren, it is sad folly that leads us in our early days to long so eagerly to be released from the restraints of home, and to set forth to fight for ourselves, and independently, the battle of life. How often do we see the fresh buoyancy of youth give place to the furrowed cheek of mature life. We know what produces the change. It is *care*—care in some one of its almost countless forms. How many look back with wistful longings to early days, when care was a stranger, or nearly so! They think and speak of those days as the happiest in their lives. But they are gone for ever. Many among us here, dear brethren, are still strangers to the carping cares of life. We have still parents and guardians to care for us, and are not yet called upon to bear for ourselves the burden and heat of the day. How shall we act so that we may not have to look back with well-founded regret at these happy days? Shall we

be restless and dissatisfied at our present position? Shall we long, with impatient eagerness, for the time when we shall be our own masters, with no kind parents' anxious watchfulness seeking to warn and guard us against the dangers and temptations of the world, which they know so much better than we? Shall we manifest impatience under their reproofs, and seek to shake off their authority? Ah, no, brethren! Those kind and loving friends will not be with us long. While they are with us we may well value them.

By the wise arrangement of a gracious God, the cares and the responsibilities of life are, usually and for the most part, averted from the young and inexperienced. For such He has provided those more advanced in life at once to carry their cares and to direct their conduct. Let this, then, be our resolution. For those set over us, let us endeavour not to add anything to the load of care which they have to carry, but rather try to take something from it; and, for ourselves, let us value and make a right use of our present advantages. Let us ever check the spirit of pride, self-will, and disobedience, which would lead us to despise parental advice and authority, and endeavour to get free from it; and, instead of this, let us cherish

a spirit of affection and confidence, which will make obedience easy, and enable us to enjoy with a peaceful conscience the free joyousness of youth. Thus, too, may we learn allegiance to another, even a Heavenly Parent. Happy, thrice happy, will it be for us if, ere our "father and mother forsake us," we have learned to look to "the Lord to take us up." If, when by distance or by death, we are severed from our father upon earth, we know how from our hearts to say—"Our Father, which art in heaven." Alas! brethren, the spirit of pride and desire for independence which sometimes makes the young long to be free from obedience to those set over them, or even leads them to break loose from home ties, these feelings follow us into our relations to our God.

The story of the prodigal is no strange or uncommon one. His home, we see from the parable, was a comfortable one. He had many hired servants to wait upon him. He had a kind and indulgent father. He had the prospect of receiving an inheritance from him. But all was not enough; he must be his own master. He asks and receives from his father the portion of goods which was to fall to him, and takes his journey to a distant land, where he might be entirely away from the restraint he so disliked.



There all his resources are soon squandered, and he begins to be in want. Now he learns at length how much he has lost. Care presses hard upon him ; he knows not how to provide himself with the very necessities of life. He envies the very servants in the house he has left. They have no care. All their wants are supplied by the head of the household. They have bread enough and to spare, but he is perishing with hunger, and full of well-grounded anxiety. Brethren, there are some among us, I know there are, who are trying thus to do without God, to live independently of Him. Well, you may try this if you will. You may succeed in getting into a very far country indeed, so far from the father's home that the thought of Him will seldom trouble you. You may not pursue the course of open sin taken by the prodigal ; yours may be a respectable, moral forgetfulness of God. What shall I say to any such here ? One thing God says, listen to it :—"The wicked shall he turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." That is an awful sentence, as unalterable as it is awful. Will you venture to face it at the last ? But even not to speak of that, how unenviable is the present state of him who keeps away from God. Remember, any such here, you

must bear your own burden. Whatever of anxiety and trouble falls to your lot, you must carry it yourself as best you can. The help man can give in such cases is very small, and you wilfully and determinately shut out and reject the help of God. How thankful would I be if some one such wanderer here to-night might have it put into his heart by God's Holy Spirit even now to say—"I will arise and go to my Father." The way to Him is open, dear brethren, and there is but one way. Turn to God through Jesus Christ. Ask Him to receive you to be indeed His loving, obedient child, by faith in your Redeemer's blood. You shall undoubtedly be welcomed thus; and you can be in no other way, for Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." To all who have thus come to God the text loudly speaks. We need ever to be on our guard against the remains or the return of that prodigal's spirit of pride and independence. Such a spirit is utterly unbecoming in a member of the family of God. To be humble and dependent is the true way to walk worthy of God; the true way to be free from care; the true way to be happy. There are some who seek to be free from care in other ways. They would fain set

themselves above the fear of evil. They would add house to house, and field to field, and hope thus to get rid of care. But those very acres are cares. There are other sources of anxiety beside those connected with poverty; and to have nothing fitted to cause anxiety is the privilege of a happier world than this. But while in this way we never can be free from care here, there is a way mentioned in the text in which we may be so. Most earnestly should we resist the desire to put ourselves beyond the need of God's help; vain, foolish, wicked desire for a child of God, surely. Instead of such a godless security, let us follow after that which springs from an entire reliance upon our Heavenly Father's help. Let our peace and happiness arise from knowing that our times are in His hands, yea, that we ourselves and everything connected with us, for time and eternity, are wholly at His disposal, who "doeth all things well."

Brethren, I know not what particular care may this evening be pressing particularly upon any one here. It may be some have cares, which they need not and ought not to have anything to do with. It may be some owe their anxiety to the eager grasping after accumulated wealth; to the seeking of honour

from man ; to the craving after some position of extraordinary dignity and influence. When such vain thoughts enter a Christian's heart he should hear a voice saying to him, reprovingly—"Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." Such cares as these are unworthy of one whose treasure is in heaven, and we are most earnestly to pray that the worldly spirit which causes them may be utterly rooted out. But if our cares be of a different class, we are here told what to do with them. If we have cause to be anxious about money—about meeting the demands made for maintaining ourselves and our families respectably in the station in which God has placed us—here is a care, and a heavy one, to be cast upon our God. Our Saviour warns us against carrying cares of this kind ourselves, as tending to divide our hearts between the world and God. He tells us to be cheered by the assurance, that He who gave life will sustain it. He points to the birds who lay up no stores of food, and to the lilies which neither toil nor spin ; and promises, that He who takes such care of them will not forget His children. And, in like manner, in another place He rebukes all such anxieties by those beautiful words—"Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give

you the kingdom." If we have reason to believe that we belong to Christ's little flock, this may well encourage us. He who calls us to inherit a kingdom, will certainly not fail to bring us safely there, and provide us with everything needful—with our travelling expenses while on the way. Our anxiety may arise from some of the many worries, annoyances, and perplexities which so often meet us on our way through the world. Let us never keep any of these unshared, but rather obey the exhortation of the Psalmist, evidently referred to in the text, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Are any of us anxious as to some important step in life which we are called upon to take? then listen to a voice which says, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."

Are we deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of some beloved relative or friend—or for the progress of our blessed Master's kingdom, which so often seems to us to be utterly retarded? Then let us never cease to pray, casting these burdens on the Lord, remembering what we are told of such intercessory prayer—"The effectual, fervent prayer of a

righteous man availeth much." If our burden be anxiety for our own spiritual progress, and the faithful employment of all that our heavenly Master has entrusted us with to lay out for Him; then let us constantly roll this also upon Him, and so we "shall renew our strength." Two things more I would notice about these words—"Casting all your care upon Him." The words here used mean, that this is to be done *once for all*. Not merely are we come to God with each individual care as it arises, but just as persons of property entrust the management of their affairs to a trusty agent, and then throw off all anxiety about them, in like manner are God's children so entirely to resign themselves into their Heavenly Father's hands, that anxiety may trouble them no longer. Everything distressing is felt, indeed, but with the knowledge, that He who has undertaken for us has this particular care already in His hands.

Then, again, as to *the way* in which care is to be thus cast on God—I need hardly say this is to be done in prayer. Whenever anything whatever distresses us, we are at once to carry it in prayer to our Father, and leave it with Him—yea, tell it to Him again and again, if necessary, till we feel that all the care is gone. In a word, we could not have a more

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complete exposition of these words, and of the effect of acting on them, than that furnished by St. Paul, in Phil. iv. 6, 7—"Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

II. Such a statement of Christian privilege needs some sure warrant to rest upon, and that is here supplied—"for He careth for you." But for this assurance, so often repeated and so abundantly proved, we might well hesitate to obey the first words of the text. We might fear to weary our God with our small, childish, foolish fears and cares. We need not fear this, however—"for He careth for us"—"the hairs of our head are all numbered" by Him—yea, not one of the poor, tiny sparrows that we daily see around us "is forgotten before God." Never let us doubt our Heavenly Father's love by thinking anything too small to lay before Him in humble prayer. We are slow to believe the loving-kindness of our Lord; but He can say no more than He has said to try to convince us of it. Listen to His words in Isa. xlix. 15:—"Can a woman forget

her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." Our position in the world will not in the slightest degree diminish this care. Men often make much of and flatter the great, while despising and dealing harshly with the little and unknown. Not so with Him who is the Maker of all. The last of men are often the first with God, as also the first are often last. This gave comfort to David in his early, lowly days, for we find him saying (Psalm xl. 17)—"But I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me: Thou art my help and my deliverer: make no tarrying, O my God." Nor does His care cease with altered circumstances, with weakness, and old age. This is often the case with man, but not with Jehovah, who "changes not." It was no doubt with fearless confidence that the Psalmist prayed (Psalm lxxi. 17, 18)—"O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works. Now, also, when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not." Brethren, thus to be the objects of our Heavenly Father's special care is no small blessing. That blessing belongs to all who are at peace



with God through Jesus Christ, who have washed their robes by faith, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and are now walking as His redeemed children. How happy should we be if these unspeakable benefits be ours! How much of earthly good do they make up for the absence of! With the assurance that our Heavenly Father is ever watching over us, and the direction given by Him to take no anxiety on ourselves, but, while doing our duty faithfully, to leave all care to Him, surely, we may well say—"Happy is the people that is in such a case, yea, blessed is that people whose God is the Lord."

But while the text addresses those who are over careful, there are those who need an exhortation the very opposite of this. How many there are whose religious state can be best described as careless. We know what this means in ordinary things. If we speak of a person as a careless scholar, a careless servant, a careless business or professional man, we do not expect much good from him. We feel that to be careless, even with partial success, is far worse than to do one's best and fail. The more important the matter concerned, the more serious and blame-worthy does the carelessness become. To

be careless at play, or in some trifling business, may seem of no importance—to be careless when the life and happiness of ourselves and others are at stake—this is a most grievous sin. Now, to those among us, for there are such, who are living in careless unconcern about Christ and salvation, I would say, Remember, this is no light matter! Think, for one moment, what tremendous things you are treating with disregard! First: There is your own soul. Is that a thing to trifle with? Are you wise to run the risk of being shut out for ever from the presence of God and the joys at His right hand, and being condemned to dwell through eternity in “the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth”? That this may be so, it only needs to be careless—to neglect Christ’s redemption. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” But you are trifling with the souls of others as well as with your own. ’Tis a cruel thing to live without God. It would be so, even if a man had the power to exercise no influence on those around him. Then he would be leaving undone for eternity a vast amount of good of which he might have been the means, and which would multiply itself for ever. But none of us can live without an influence. If

the world be not the better for our passage through it, it will certainly be the worse. How awful to look back upon a life the fruit of which was evil and not good—was to lead man's thoughts away from God and their eternal destinies, and not nearer to God and heaven! Surely, the thought of these things should make you anxious, my fellow-sinners. One thing I entreat of you, be careless no more! Such a spirit injures yourself, but it injures others also—and that I am sure you would not wish to do. We cannot, any of us, travel either to heaven or hell alone. That seems certain. How, then, shall we avoid leading others wrong. I answer—in this way alone—by ourselves going right. And if God arouse you by His blessed Spirit, as I pray that He may, to the solemnity and reality of life—what are you then to do? Are all your days to come to be sad and gloomy? Surely, no. Our Lord would have his servants happy and cheerful, “rejoicing evermore” in Him. How shall such happiness be secured by one anxious about eternity? Before, he did not at all realize the great business of life, and so went on carelessly leaving it undone; now, he desires peace and happiness by having this matter settled, not by neglecting it. Rest not until you come to Christ,

and commend your soul to Him. That is your great concern, your chief care—cast it upon Him. He will take and keep what you thus entrust to Him, “for He careth for you.” He came to seek and to save the lost, and now He lives to receive sinners. Soon all other cares shall have passed away for all of us. We shall be heard of here no more. God grant that when the spark of life is waning, and all things earthly are vanishing away, we may be able humbly and truthfully to say—“I am not ashamed, for I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”

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## SERMON IV.

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THE ARMY OF CHRIST: ITS PREPARATION AGAINST THE  
ENEMY.

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“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”—1 PET. v. 8.

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THE few opening verses of this chapter, some of which we have had before us the last Sunday evenings, are very full and comprehensive. Viewing the Church of Christ as a great army in active service, we have here directions given to every soldier of the cross as to the way he is to act in all the varied relations in which he is placed. In the first verses of the chapter we find exhortations addressed to those whom we may regard as the officers in Christ's army—the ministers of His Church; while, in the following verses, Christians in general are addressed. Now, how complete is the short summary of duty here laid down. It embraces the chief instructions we need while fighting here below the good fight of faith. The

fifth verse tells how we ought to act and feel toward our fellow-soldiers, whether they hold the position of officers or privates—namely, with humility and proper subordination ; the sixth and seventh verses tell something of our duty toward the Great King and General of all ; we are implicitly to submit to His authority, and unwaveringly to rely upon His care. Now, but one thing remains, that, as we have been told our duty toward our fellow-soldiers and toward the Captain of our salvation, so we should be directed as to our duty toward the enemy with whom we have continually to engage. Directions of this kind are supplied in the text, and to these I would now ask your prayerful attention, as well as to the solemn reason here given for attending to them.

I. First, then, let us consider the command, “Be sober, be vigilant.” To some, such an exhortation may seem quite out of keeping with the words which go before it—“Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.” They would say, Surely if God engages thus to take complete charge of us for soul and body, there is no need that we should use any exertions. Many, it is to be feared, act on this sadly mistaken principle. They seek to sever God’s promises from His precepts. They would fain enjoy the one,

without endeavouring to perform the other. Some, possessed of real union with Christ, may be misled by such a view, and by it be much injured in their spiritual progress; but far more, I believe, who act on this principle, do so from being strangers to the real renewing power of the faith of Christ. However, no matter how logical and reasonable such a view of things may seem, this much is certain, the reasoning of Scripture is the very reverse of this. It ever makes the fact of God's special promise of help an argument for increased care, and not for carelessness on our part. So does St. Paul argue with the Philipian Christians (ii. 13)—“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure.” The truth is, without that special help from above, no effort of ours could be of the least avail. This we shall see very plainly when considering the second portion of the text. The hindrances to our spiritual life and growth, both from within and from without, are such as might well lead any one thinking of them to give up all hope of growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and of reaching the land of everlasting life. If we know anything of our enemies, we can only get strength and courage from

the assurance that "God is on our side." Without that assurance we would be utterly paralyzed, feeling that any exertions we might make must be vain ; while with it we should be nerved with energy to use every fitting means of defence, in the sure hope of final victory.

The heart of man is like a citadel or fortress. By nature it is occupied by the powers of darkness, by the god of this world. Often for years, with some, alas ! for ever, Satan holds almost undisputed sway, and, while he does, there is no conflict. But when Christ enters in, this awful tranquillity comes to an end. Satan will not surrender his place without a hard struggle ; and when he has been thrust out, he constantly seeks re-admission. Man's heart is then like a beleagured fortress, the enemy ever watching for some unguarded approach, and ready to come in like a flood at any moment. What will be the effect upon the sentinel as he thinks of this tremendous and ever-threatening danger ? If he dwell on it alone, he must be utterly panic-stricken, full of paralyzing fears, which will quite unfit him for his work. But if he turn his eyes to "Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier ;" if he rest upon His promise of unfailing help, upon His assurance of



constant care for His servant's safety, then will he be able to keep guard with fearless heart and unfaltering step. He will not be hindered, as before, by wearing anxiety from attending to his Commander's orders, knowing that His Lord is constantly caring for him, and ready to send relief at the first and faintest call of distress ; he will have his mind calm and collected to mark the first onset of the enemy. Thus we see that the command to "Cast all our care on God," is by no means inconsistent with the other, to "Be sober and vigilant ;" nay more, so great is the peril of our position, that none could calmly obey the latter who did not in some measure obey the former, relying on the care and assistance of his Lord. Now, let us try to ascertain the meaning of the command, "Be sober." The word has one of the two senses we usually attach to it, meaning to abstain from drunkenness. We know that in the army to be drunk on duty is a most serious offence. So serious is it, that in time of war it is frequently punished with death. No less serious is this crime in the army of Jesus Christ. St. Paul exhorts the Ephesian Christians—"Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess ;" and tells them that "Drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Alas ! that

- exhortations and warnings such as these should not be unneeded even in our favoured days ! Alas, that among rich and poor alike, this hateful vice should mar the happiness of many a home, and degrade and destroy its miserable victim for time and eternity ! May all of us be saved from the slightest approach to this most terrible evil. Let us watch the first beginnings of temptations, and resolutely, in God's strength, withstand at the outset what we might vainly struggle against afterwards.

Moreover, this temperance should extend to eating as well as drinking. Here also there is much danger of excess—of “living to eat,” instead of “eating to live.” We would need to guard ourselves in this matter, lest the body should lord it over the spirit. In a word, if we would be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we may well desire to have the prayer of the Collect fulfilled for ourselves—“O Lord, who for our sakes didst fast forty days and forty nights ; give us grace to use such abstinence, that our flesh being subdued to the spirit, we may ever obey Thy Godly motions in righteousness and true holiness.” The body, with its appetites, is a good servant but a bad master ; and if fasting be needful, as many a Christian finds it, to keep the body in its proper place, then should it

be prayerfully and unostentatiously used for this purpose.

Most of Christ's most faithful soldiers have ever felt self-denial, in some form, to be very needful, as was the case even with St. Paul, who says—"I keep under my body, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." Of course what has been said does not for one moment mean, that it is unlawful to enjoy our food when partaking of it. Our God has "given us all things richly to enjoy." "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." It will be our best help to a right and temperate use of these and all the other gifts of God, to keep ever before our minds the inspired direction—"Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." But I am sure these words are intended to include much more than this. Our blessed Lord warns His servants to "take heed lest at any time their hearts be overcharged," not only "with surfeiting and drunkenness," but also with "cares of this life." We may be intoxicated with other things beside wine. There are many things which have the same effect upon the spirit that wine and spirituous

liquors used in excess have upon both body and spirit.

Anything that overcharges, unduly engrosses the thoughts and affections, and keeps us from proper regard to the things of God and eternity, may be regarded as excluded by the command—"Be sober." Very truly does Archbishop Leighton say—"Many that are sober men and of temperate diet, yet are spiritually intemperate, drunk with pride, or covetousness, or passion; drunk with self-love and love of their pleasures and ease, with love of the world, which, as St. John tells us, cannot consist with the love of God; drunk with inordinate, unlawful love even of their lawful calling, and the lawful gain they pursue by it. Their hearts are still going after it, and so reeling to and fro, never fixed on God and heavenly things, but either hurried up and down with incessant business; or, if sometimes at ease, it is as the case of a drunken man, not composed to better and wiser thoughts, but falling into a dead sleep, contrary to the watching here joined with sobriety."

This brings us to the second exhortation—"Be vigilant." That is, be wakeful and watchful. This is, indeed, an exhortation much needed in these days

of ease and outward prosperity to the Church of God. Ah ! brethren, could we see things as God sees them, how sad would seem to us the state of the professing Church ! How few of Christ's so-called soldiers are found awake at all ! How many even among us here to-night are fast asleep in sin—as indifferent to the things of God and eternity as a sleeping man would be to what was going on around him ? The sound of the Gospel message is, indeed, too loudly and constantly echoed amongst us in this favoured land to allow many to sleep on quite undisturbed. But there may be many a startling of the slumberer, which will only leave him to return to his old state—yea, to still deeper sleep. Beware, dear brethren, I pray you, of allowing the Saviour's call in the Gospel to sound again and again unheeded. If you do so, you run the terrible risk of being numbered among those on whom, from long custom, the most startling and earnest appeals have not the least effect—"They will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charming never so wisely." Listen, I pray you, this night, to a Voice which says—"What meanest thou, O sleeper ? arise, and call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon thee, that thou perish not."

To those who, by the grace of God, have been

roused from the sleep of sin, our text says—"Be vigilant." Keep awake. This is a command not easily obeyed. The atmosphere in which we are called to live is one in which it is very hard to keep awake to the things that are unseen and eternal. We know that often on a sultry summer day, or in a crowded assembly, the air is so oppressive that everyone gets drowsy, and it is no easy thing to keep awake. Just such is the atmosphere of this world for man as regards his spiritual life. There is everything in it to keep asleep those who have not yet been awakened, and to put asleep those who have. Most earnestly should we guard against everything that would foster this dangerous tendency. Here, as with the exhortation, "be sober," there is a very close connection between the bodily sin and the spiritual state. We all know the value of sleep. Without its frequent refreshment, our frail bodies could not possibly endure for years, as they do, the wear and tear of life. But, like most good things in this world, this may bring evil if used in excess. Too much sleep will weaken and impair instead of invigorating the powers of mind and body. Let us carefully check at the beginning the tendency to sloth and indolence. If we do not, it will gain ever-

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increasing strength as life advances; and, instead of rising each morning refreshed by moderate sleep to pay our morning sacrifice, and enter cheerfully on the duties of the day, we will wake from unsound, because too protracted slumber, to enter hurriedly on our occupations, with little time or energy for study of God's Word and prayer, and with a dreamy listlessness following us in all we do. What account shall we render at the last for many precious hours thus vainly squandered, and worse than squandered, in lazy self-indulgence? To indulge in such a habit will effectually destroy the vigilance commanded us here. Nothing is more opposed to the ever-wakeful caution needed by the Christian soldier than the drowsiness thus produced. A sleepy sentinel cannot possibly escape the notice of the watchful enemy of our souls. Against such he will send many a special temptation. He will easily succeed in gaining access to the heart of the unguarded soldier, and implant there many a root of bitterness; if, in no other way, he can, with no difficulty, transform himself into an angel of light, and then the unwary sentinel will unhesitatingly allow him to pass unchallenged into the very citadel, bearing deadly evil unperceived along with him.

This vigilance of spirit is truly of immense importance. We will ever need it until we exchange the Church militant for the Church triumphant. Till then, let us never forget that we are soldiers on active service. Satan will try to make us forget this; to lull us to sleep in false security; but let us not be "ignorant of his devices." He will at times try to persuade us that we have so completely overcome him, that he has quite given up assailing us with our besetting sins. He will tell us that, as victorious veterans, we may sleep now and take our rest. Let us never heed him—he only seeks to put us off our guard. Let us contentedly leave that perfect rest for by-and-by, rejoicing to know that "there is a rest for the people of God." Till that is reached, be it ours to obey our Great Captain's standing orders—"Watch and pray." So shall safe and undisturbed rest soon be ours, and in view of that we may obey the exhortation of this same epistle—"The end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

II. The reason given here for obedience to this exhortation is certainly a strong one. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Well may Satan be



called "our adversary." To him we owe all our sin and sorrow, and pain and death. The word adversary is a translation of the Hebrew name Satan, given to him in the Old Testament. He is ever represented as first seducing men to sin, and then, in some mysterious way, appearing to accuse and calumniate them before God. To this corresponds the Greek word devil, which means a slanderer or false accuser, according to those words of triumph, which we read in Rev. xii. 10, uttered when "that old serpent called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world," is with his angels cast out of heaven—"the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night." How hateful is this description of Satan's character, full as it is of fellest malignity! We have this description confirmed by what the text tells of his conduct—"He walketh about as a roaring lion." This corresponds with his own confession in the book of Job. We there read, in the first and second chapters, that Satan having appeared among the sons of God—the angels in heaven—when presenting themselves before the Lord, the Lord asked him, "Whence comest thou?" He answers—"From going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it." What a

contrast to Another, of Whom we are told that He “went about doing good”! Satan goes about not to save but to destroy. “He walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” What terror does the lion’s roar strike into the heart of him who hears it in the forest or jungle. It tells of the nearness of a creature of savage strength, of unpitied cruelty, and of insatiable hunger. To this ferocious animal Satan is compared, and, being such, our text says he is ever wandering through the earth, “seeking whom he may devour.” Some he reckons as his certain prey, whom he needs no special effort to secure. They lie asleep in careless indifference to their spiritual state—asleep in worldliness and sin—quite unconscious of any danger. Others once, perhaps, as careless, are so no more. They have been roused from that death-like sleep, and are now somewhat awake to the danger. These Satan plies with special temptations, seeking to lull them to sleep again, that he may devour them with the others. He would fain have both soul and body destroyed with himself in hell, and spares no pains that this may be so. Surely all this is quite enough to enforce the exhortation—“Be sober, be vigilant.” Our enemy is too formidable to be trifled with. We must not

think lightly of the conflict, but engage in it with an earnest, self-denying, watchful spirit. Let us, if we be indeed fighting the good fight of faith, ever cultivate such a spirit; and, relying on a strength not our own, the weakest, feeblest of Christ's faithful soldiers, terrible as are their foes, shall yet be "more than conquerors through Him that loved them."

Brethren, there is a great battle waging in the world—it has been waging for thousands of years—a battle between good and evil, light and darkness, sin and holiness, Christ and Satan. I want each one to ask himself—Which side am I taking in the conflict? Either you must be taking—for there is no neutrality. One of the heads of the contending forces has been presented to us in our text this evening. Say, brethren, is there anything attractive in the description given of him? I see nothing of the kind. Were he a good, worthy, noble, generous leader, we might understand why many flock to his standard and fight his battles; or, what still more favours his cause, why many, while wearing the Christian uniform, are found drunk or asleep at their posts, thus leaving a way open for his assaults. It cannot be from any love his soldiers bear their leader that they follow him. We could not imagine a more hateful being

than he, and love dwells not in his army. Why, then, do any follow him? I will tell you. They are mercenaries, and they love the wages he gives, knowing nothing better. The drunkard loves his drunkenness, the sluggard his sleep, and they consider not that "the end of these things is death." Oh, brethren, let none here think it a light thing to be intoxicated with sin and worldliness, or asleep in indolent indifference to the things of God. In all this you are doing service to your great adversary, the devil, who hates you with foulest malice, and plots your eternal ruin; and you are opposing and insulting your one true loving Friend, who, while we were yet sinners, died for us that we might live through Him.

Brethren, I this evening bring a message—an authoritative message—from this gracious Saviour, "whose I am and whom I serve." As His ambassador—"as though God did beseech you by me, I pray you, in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God." Hitherto you have worn His uniform, while all the time intoxicated with worldliness, and asleep in sin. Dishonour Him thus no more. As you wear His uniform, fight His battles. Pray Him to forgive your past negligence and apathy, if not open oppo-

sition and glaring sin. Lay down your arms at His feet, never to be wielded against your Lord again. You shall be received notwithstanding all that is past. There is forgiveness with Him — forgiveness purchased with His most precious blood. If you turn to Him with hearty repentance and true faith, He will say, as once He did while here—"I do not condemn thee, go and sin no more." Take Him at His word, and so, being justified by faith in that word, you shall have peace with God through Him. If thus we have entered on Christ's service, let our great ambition be to be good, brave, faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ. Let us "be sober and vigilant," remembering the enemy; and cheerful and courageous, remembering our Lord. Let this be the great problem of our lives—how may we during our life do most to pull down the strongholds of Satan and build up the kingdom of Christ both in our own souls and in the world. Let us be willing to endure hardness, if necessary, for Christ's sake. If we be "children of light and of the day," then "let us not sleep as do others, but watch and be sober;" putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation.

## SERMON V.

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THE ARMY OF CHRIST: ITS CONFLICT WITH THE ENEMY.

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“Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”—1 ST. PETER, v. 9.

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IN this verse, and that which goes before it, we have set before us the duty of the soldiers of the cross in relation to their great enemy. In each, however, that duty appears to be regarded from a somewhat different point of view. In the eighth verse we are told what is the right spirit in which the Christian soldier should await the onset of the foe, which may take place at any moment; while in the ninth verse, which is our text this evening, he is directed how to act when absolutely engaged in conflict. The second half of each of these verses contains a powerful reason and incitement for obeying the exhortation

of the first part. The command—"Be sober, be vigilant," is enforced by the declaration that "our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." And we are in the text encouraged to "resist him stedfast in the faith," by the assurance that "the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren that are in the world."

I. That we may enter rightly into the spirit of this verse, we will need to get a view of the nature of the assaults which we are here directed how to meet. We could not have a better help to this than to glance at the account given us of the most remarkable conflict which ever took place in the world, the temptation of our great Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the wilderness. That eventful forty days of solitude, fasting, and temptation, we specially commemorate at this season of Lent, and truly blessed will the commemoration be if, through it, we gain a better knowledge of the wiles of the devil, and learn to stand against them as our blessed Master did. Through those forty days, during the whole of which, we are told, He was tempted of the devil, the power of the temptation being increased by the utter loneliness of his situation, far from the haunts and help

of man, and in the midst of wild beasts—through this time it is thought by some, arguing from the nature of the three recorded temptations, that our blessed Lord was specially assailed by doubts as to the continued care of the Father, who appeared to have forsaken Him, and as to His exalted dignity as the very and eternal Son of God. Of this, of course, we can have no certainty, as Scripture is silent regarding it, but the opinion falls in with the opening words of the two first recorded temptations—“If Thou be the Son of God.” How often does Satan use successfully with the servants of Christ a suggestion that failed with their Lord. How often does he build his temptations upon doubts of the care and love of our Father in heaven, yea, upon doubts that He is our Father at all, drawn from the sorrows and difficulties of our position in the world. He says to the tried and tempted believer in Jesus—“If thou be the child of God,” why art thou thus? where is the proof of a Father’s love and care? Should such temptations assail us, dear Christian brethren, let us look again at the title deeds of our inheritance, and if we be, indeed, relying with a living faith on the atonement of our Saviour, and what cannot be separated from that, if we be led by the Spirit



of God in the path of obedience and holiness, then let us not doubt, because some passing cloud hides our Father's face—let us not doubt His own word, that we are “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,” that being “led by the Spirit of God, we are the sons of God.” Remember this, it is as pardoned sinners accepted in the Beloved, and only as such, that we have either the will or the power to fight our Lord's battles; and, this being so, we need not wonder that Satan should commence his severest assaults upon the children of God, by seeking to make them doubt their sonship. Such doubts are by no means a proof of the absence of true faith in Christ, as, on the other hand, freedom from all doubt is no proof of the presence of such faith. Many a timid humble follower of Christ is continually tossed up and down with doubts and fears. Satan points every temptation with the terrible doubt—“If thou be a child of God.” Thus is the soldier of Christ shorn of much of the joy, and strength, and courage which he so much needs in “fighting the good fight of faith.” But if doubts like these be coupled with a yearning, earnest desire to please Christ and glorify Him—with an humble and contrite spirit that trembles at God's word, then,

with regard to such, the instructions of Christ's ambassadors are—"Say ye to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not." Seek to get rid of your doubts. Pray every time you kneel down, yea, again and again through the day—"Lord Jesus, increase my faith, I beseech Thee;" and thus "giving all diligence to the full assurance of faith and hope unto the end," you shall be taught by the great Master to look more simply to His cross, and so will find "the joy of the Lord to be indeed your strength."

But, on the other hand, freedom from doubt is by no means a proof that the soul is right with God. It has been said, I think, with truth, that "there can be no faith without doubt at some time." However this may be, I cannot but fear there are too many too ready to be mistaken on this subject. From some wrong view of the real spiritual character of the religion of Christ; from vain reliance upon some short-lived religious emotion experienced in the past; from the partial judgment of friends, or the still more lenient judgment of their own self-love—from some such ground they have succeeded in persuading themselves that all is well with them. No doubt on this subject ever crosses their mind for

a moment, or if it does, it is not allowed to disquiet this awful but fictitious peace. They themselves alone, however, are deceived as to their state, or some too partial friends ; for others, a life of unchecked selfishness, of all-absorbing worldliness and frivolity, perhaps of antinomian immorality, enable the most irreligious worldling, no less than the most discerning Christian, to perceive that such empty professors have “neither part nor lot in the matter;” that “their heart is not right in the sight of God ;” that they are still “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” Such persons may *say* they have faith, but if they have it is even less effective than that of the devils, which, we are told, makes them tremble. Brethren, if there be but one here present to whom what has just been said applies in whole or in part, I beseech you, continue no longer to take the sleeping draught that keeps you ignorant of your true condition. Better, surely, to awake to your real state now, while it may be remedied, than to do so at the last as a member of that hopeless, hapless company of whom our blessed Saviour says—“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many won-

derful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity." All this may seem a long digression from the subject, but, brethren, I believe it is not so, or, if it be, it is not a needless digression. Vain professions of religion, common at every period of the Church's history, arise as much from self-deception as from hypocrisy. In truth, these are very often connected, for few can long try to deceive others, whether they be successful or not, without at length succeeding in deceiving themselves. Nay more, all of us are in danger of deceiving ourselves in some measure; and we need to seek to be, above all things, honest with ourselves—"speaking the truth in our hearts." Sham soldiers may pass muster before the eye of man in the professing Church on earth, but it needs others to stand at last before the Son of Man, as now it needs others to do real battle with our spiritual foes. The temptations with which Satan assailed our Lord, and which he reserves still for us, need to be met in a real, honest, faithful spirit, for they are by no means easy to resist. He takes advantage of our bodily appetites to allure us to excessive or unlawful indulgence. So did he avail himself of our Saviour's hour of weakness and

hunger, after that long fasting, to tempt Him to seek provision in a way not then permitted; and so does he still employ the lust of the flesh in some of its varied forms to lure the soul away from happiness and God. No less does he tempt us by the pride of life, that weapon, one of the class peculiarly his own. He would have the Christian presumptuous now, as before distrustful. Yea, as in our blessed Master's case, he would desecrate Scripture exhortations to faith, and make them seem warrants for presumption. Nor is the least of his temptations "the lust of the eyes," "the pomps and vanity of this wicked world." Daily does he spread before the Christian soldier, in the form most alluring to him, the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them, and offers all to him that will fall down and worship him. These are his chief temptations; and every faithful soldier of Christ knows something of their power, specially when wielded by such a powerful enemy. How, then, are we to deal with him when he assails us with any of these fiery darts of temptation? Our text says, we are to "resist him stedfast in the faith." This he will try to keep us from doing, for Satan is a coward, and only succeeds by cunning arts and stratagems, not by bold and open warfare.

Accordingly, St. James says (iv. 7)—“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” A firm, steady, decided opposition, in God’s strength, to any temptation when first presented, will be the best way to keep safe from it. We will ever need to guard against “giving place to the devil.” Even though we should at first withstand, yet if we harbour the thought of sin—and regard iniquity in our hearts—it will make us all the more weak for meeting the next assault of the same or a like temptation. When we know anything to be wrong, then let us give it no quarter—let us never stand parleying with the enemy, but ever deal with him as our Saviour did. He met him at each advance with the sword of the Spirit, which He wielded so skilfully that we might learn from His example how to fight the good fight. We see, then, that the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God—is intended both as a defensive and an offensive weapon. We need it continually, and should carefully see to it, that we are ever girt about with it, so as to have it ever ready for use. How foolish would that soldier seem to us who, meeting his foe upon the battle-field eager to bear down all he met, should ask him to wait till he might go and fetch his sword, which in the morning

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he had carelessly omitted to gird on when leaving his tent! We would hardly expect such a request to be complied with. At all events, our spiritual enemy will not act thus. If we have not the Word of God carefully treasured up in our memory by constant and prayerful study, as a sword in the sheath hanging by the soldier's side, we can have little reason to expect victory. Nay, brethren, so constantly are we exposed to temptation, while in this present evil world, that we would do well to have the sword constantly drawn and out of the scabbard, taking some special precept or promise with us to think about each day, that so we may follow the excellent example of the Psalmist, who said—"Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee."

II. This quite falls in with the direction given in the text as to the manner in which this resistance is to be maintained—"Whom resist *stedfast in the faith.*" The whole of that "faith once for all delivered to the saints" is contained in Holy Scripture; and the idea of the text appears to be, that we are to have such a real sense of the great facts and doctrines there revealed, that, surrounded by them as our defence, we may stand firm against the assaults

of Satan. This would correspond with the direction of St. Paul in Eph. vi. where, after describing all the minute parts of the Christian armour, he says—“Above all”—that is, over all, to defend parts of the body otherwise unprotected—“above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” The shield here spoken of is not the small, light, rounded shield or buckler attached to the arm, but the large, oblong, four-cornered shield which got its name from its resemblance in shape to a door, and which was curved in such a way as to half encircle the body.

We can easily see how, did the objects of Christian faith surround us like such a shield, we would be defended from most temptations. Those objects of Christian faith, unseen save by the spiritual eye, are partly present and partly future, according to the saying of the Apostle—“Faith is the substance of things hoped for,” and also “the evidence of things not seen.”

As the evidence of things present, but unseen, how powerful is faith. It enables us to get a view not only of the spiritual enemy with whom we have to fight, with his malice and craftiness, but it also reveals to us the present help on which we may reckon.



Though our great enemy be strong and his legions numerous, "They that be with us are more than they that be with him. With him is the arm of the creature, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles." Our Triune God is ever looking upon His soldiers as they fight His battles here. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong," in behalf of those whose trust is in Him. If, then, we have a real present faith in God—in God the Father who made us ; in God the Son who redeemed us ; in God the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us, we have indeed a never-failing source of strength against temptation. If we live as in the constant presence of our God, will not this be the hearty feeling with regard to each allurements to evil, whether from within or without—"How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Moreover, how weak would all temptations be could we look at them in the light of eternity, surrounded by the objects of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for ! How mean would seem to us some short-lived sinful indulgence of the flesh, how tawdry all the vain pomp and glory of the world, were we constantly gazing through the telescope of faith at the

excelling glory of the heavenly Jerusalem—at the good things which God has prepared for them that love Him. Let us each pray earnestly, if we be still unbelieving, “Lord, give me faith ;” if we believe, “Lord, increase my faith ;” and so, realizing the present enemy with whom we have to fight, the present Friend and Saviour ever ready to help us, and the future crown of life promised to him that is faithful unto death, we shall know something of what the Apostle meant when he said—“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

III. But a special reason is here given why we should thus stand firm, strengthened by the objects of faith by which we are surrounded—“Knowing,” or being aware, “that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” It has ever been one of Satan’s plans to keep Christ’s soldiers forgetful of this. He would fain weaken us by the thought that we fight alone. But ’tis not so. No matter what our affliction may be, others have borne and are bearing the same. So it was with those whom the Apostle Peter specially addresses here. Their affliction, as we saw when considering a previous verse of this chapter, consisted in persecution for Christ’s sake, and many at that time shared in

their sufferings. The noble army of martyrs and confessors received large accessions in those early days. In our days afflictions spring chiefly from other sources. There are those connected with bereavement, with straitened circumstances, with excessive care, with petty vexations and misunderstandings. And as the badge of Christ's true soldiers in every age, there are the inward fightings and fears of the Christian life, the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that we cannot do the things that we would.

Now, whether the distresses we feel are to be traced to these or other causes, there is something encouraging in a certain way in the remembrance, that the same afflictions are endured by the Christian brotherhood throughout the world. St. Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians of this—"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man : but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. x. 13.) There are many now living on the earth able to bear witness to the truth of this declaration. Their afflictions have indeed been many and great, but the Lord has

delivered them out of all. Our enemy, whatever he may say, has often been conquered by thousands of others, in themselves just as weak as we. Never has he utterly cast down and finally overcome any true faithful soldier of the cross; to patient, persevering faith the crown of victory is sure. The Lord hath never at any age "forsaken them that seek Him." Through faith in Him "they have subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness they have been made strong." Now they have exchanged faith for sight—suffering and fatigue for everlasting rest. Let us take courage. If their Lord be our Lord, their victory and their rest shall be ours too. Whatever meet them on the way, "it is our Father's good pleasure to give His little flock the kingdom;" and "we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God."

To those here present, who are not fighting the good fight of faith, but habitually yielding to the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil—save when they are restrained by prudence, by regard for the opinion of man, or something of that kind, shall I say—"Resist the devil." Certainly.

If you do not resist him he will lead you, even here, to lowest depths of misery and degradation. "The way of transgressors is hard," even in this present world. If a man gives loose rein to all his desires, the end of such a course even now must be "desolation and woe." Or, if you mean one day to turn to God, think what difficulties you are creating for yourself. You are daily forging and coiling, and rivetting upon yourself strong iron chains of habits of worldliness, sensuality, and ungodliness, which may bind you for a hapless eternity; or, if they be broken here, can only be so with many a pang unneeded but for them. But there can be no resistance, such as the text speaks of, made by those who are living away from Christ. He that thinks of resisting the devil in his own strength will soon discover his weakness. If you would, indeed, be delivered from Satan's bondage effectually, then I would say—"If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed." Yes, dear brethren, even now, sin in all its forms, is slavery—God's service alone is perfect freedom. Well may we long to enjoy some foretaste of "the glorious liberty of the children of God." Brethren, if the strong man armed is to be dislodged, it must, and only can be, by the entrance of the

stronger. You cannot thrust Satan out yourself, but the Lord Jesus can. Never rest satisfied till He enters in to dwell in your heart by faith—to be in you the spring of present grace—the hope of future glory.

There can be no true fighting against sin without living, strength-imparting union with the Lord Jesus Christ. See to it then that such union exist. It is very simple and very real in its character. It is just a looking up to and calling upon Him, first for pardon and acceptance with God, and then for strength to please Him and overcome the devil, and “live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.” Do not defer, but take at once this first grand decisive step toward dedicating yourself to God. You may find difficulties in the way—you certainly will do so, but let not this cast you down, for few, if any, have entered on the narrow path without many a struggle to break loose from what would hold them back from doing so. “The same afflictions have been accomplished in the brethren which are in the world.” Only see to it, that you stop not short of true faith in the Saviour—of living union with Him. From that union you shall get strength for real conflict against the devil’s tempta-

tions. The fruits of that conflict well make up for the distresses of it. The more fully light takes the place of darkness, holiness of sin, Christ of Satan—the more completely the spirit of the world is thrust out by the spirit which is of God, the more truly happy will be our life on earth. Oh! what peace will that bring us at the last! How blessed to be able, in our humble measure, to take up then the words of the Apostle—"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."











